

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 32 | Issue 4

Article 14

10-1-2015

Leech, THE HAMMER OF THE CARTESIANS: HENRY MOORE'S PHILOSOPHY OF SPIRIT AND THE ORIGINS OF MODERN ATHEISM

Lesley-Anne Dyer Williams

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Williams, Lesley-Anne Dyer (2015) "Leech, THE HAMMER OF THE CARTESIANS: HENRY MOORE'S PHILOSOPHY OF SPIRIT AND THE ORIGINS OF MODERN ATHEISM," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 32 : Iss. 4 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol32/iss4/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

project and encourages theologians to continue responding to God's "divine generosity" in art and culture in a way that renders divinity in an imperfect but ever-striving performance of interpretation. Such efforts, Worley contends, yield a theology of the incarnation grounded in the practicalities of material culture that eschews protracted theorizing and participates in the ongoing creative disclosure of the divine.

Over fifty years ago, Oxford University Press published a collection of essays by Paul Tillich under the title *Theology of Culture*. *Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture* continues this tradition of reflection in superb fashion. For those interested in the thought of David Brown, theology of culture (or theology for culture) generally, Christianity and the arts, or religion, embodiment, and the incarnation, as well as the implications of these themes for philosophy of religion, this book is essential reading. The text is at times weighty and jargon-filled and not for the uninitiated. This is a collection of scholars writing to and for other scholars. But the payoff is well worth the effort.

Beyond its occasional, but generally necessary, opacity of concepts and language, the book's only limitation is its relative inattention to continental and postmodern thinkers. Including them would, in my opinion, open the conversation both philosophically and theologically beyond the parameters of a narrowly construed Christian theological tradition. That aside, MacSwain and Worley have put together a kind of conversation in print among some of the leading thinkers on Christianity and culture around some of the most important topics of the day at a time when the cultural relevance of the church is increasingly called into question. More than mere a primer on the work of David Brown, *Theology, Aesthetics and Culture* makes an original and important contribution to theology of culture in its own right and deserves the attention of anyone interested in how Church doctrine and Christian theology generally might meaningfully engage with the secular world of art and culture.

The Hammer of the Cartesians: Henry Moore's Philosophy of Spirit and the Origins of Modern Atheism, by David Leech. Leuven: Peeters, 2013. xvi + 278 pages. €52 (paper).

LESLEY-ANNE DYER WILLIAMS, Baylor University

Henry Moore was a seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonist who was among the first to write philosophy in English rather than Latin. He also played a major role in the rise of a new kind of natural theology, known as physico-theology, based upon the scientific advances of the age. This book argues that Henry Moore articulated a new concept of spirit in order



to protect Christian Europe from atheism and that, paradoxically, this defense helped to foster the conditions for modern intellectual atheism's flourishing. Leech does not claim that atheism could not have developed without Moore's defense of the concept of spirit, merely that this turned out to be the historical fact. The book's thesis is argued through a careful, contextual interpretation of Moore's letters with Descartes (1648–1649), the *Antidote against atheism* (1671), the *Enchiridion metaphysicum* (1671), and the *Refutation of Spinoza* (1679).

The first part of the book explains why wrong conceptions of spirit led to latent atheism. The most common conceptions of spirit in Moore's day were the scholastic and the Cartesian, but both views seemed increasingly unintelligible to many. The scholastics thought that spirit was a substance with an "holenmeric structure if it is extended but not in the way that a corporeal substance is extended" (22). Thus, a soul can be present to both the body and individual body parts as a whole. Cartesians thought that spirit was inextended and nowhere. This view was called "nullibism." Moore, like many Christians of his day, considered the existence of spirit to be a core theistic doctrine, and he saw challenges to its intelligibility as latently atheistic. The denial of spirit entailed materialism and undermined the doctrine of divine omnipresence and transcendence, even though few openly espoused atheism in his day.

The second part discusses Moore's approach to finite spirit in soul-body debates. Moore was particularly bothered by the intelligibility of finite spirit separated from all body, especially the Averroists' defense of the soul's immortality. He was also concerned by the soft materialism of the hylomorphists who thought the essential nature of the soul was the formation of the body. According to Moore, the soul informs the body but not essentially. Seeing the implications of these theories for life on earth and after death, Henry Moore defends the notion of finite spirit against the latent atheism he perceived in the scholastics and Cartesians.

The third part articulates Moore's most famous doctrine of God as "infinite spirit from infinite space" (123). In the *Enchiridion*, Henry Moore argued for a new concept of spirit based upon the idea that there are two kinds of extension, material and immaterial. Spirit had the latter kind of extension, and God is an infinite spirit from infinite space. This view represented a radical departure from his earlier Plotinian holenmeric conception of spirit, but it does employ Platonic metaphors of the sun and light.

Moore's conception received a great deal of criticism. Against extended spirit, Bayle argued that only material extension existed. Some accused Moore of Spinozism, even though Spinoza disagreed with Moore's concept of substance and Moore attacked Spinoza's pantheism as a form of atheism. Others claimed that Moore was positing space as coeternal with God. Moore responded to this claim by making clear that space and time are not "certain external (but necessary) concomitants of the divine existence," rather, they are "obscure revelation[s]' of the divine presence/

eternity" (173–174). Despite much opposition, luminaries such as Newton and Clarke adopted Moore's conception of infinite spirit. It influenced Newton's idea that space is distinct from body. It is also evident in Clarke's correspondence with Leibniz, who remarks that Clarke has a "deplorable English tendency" of thinking that spirit is extended (185).

Leech contends that through Newton and Clarke, Henry Moore contributed to the currents of secularizing thought identified by Charles Taylor. While he developed his concept of spirit with a view to addressing soul-body relation and divine omnipresence and action, he inadvertently destroyed the intellectual context necessary for analogy of being. If God and man are both spirit, as Moore maintained, humans know God through reason and not merely analogously. Physico-theology contributed to the tendency to remove Christology and devotion from the center of intellectual theistic thought, replacing it instead with reason and natural religion. In fact, for Moore, since atheism was fundamentally irrational, atheism and enthusiasm shared the same problem—a preference for animal appetite over intellect.

Leech argues for his thesis convincingly, with an admirable attention to detail. He places Henry Moore within an international context and does so with astonishing breadth and erudition, citing French and Latin without translation. Despite the conclusion that Moore's conception of spirit may have implied pantheism and atheism, Leech thinks that it may serve as a cautionary tale for those tempted to shy away from holism. For those willing to invest the effort, Moore's views certainly provide new fodder for thinking about contemporary issues, such as the interaction problem, the definition of the physical, and the role of virtue in religious epistemology. The most important reason to read Moore within his contemporary international context is for its potential to enliven the categories employed in contemporary debates concerning divine omnipresence by reminding us of a concept used all too rarely today—spirit.